

## WELCOME TO UPPER SOURIS NWR

With the coming of warm air and prairie crocuses of spring also comes the annual courtship display of many birds. One of the most unique and easiest to observe and take photos of is the "dancing" of the sharp-tailed grouse of Upper Souris Refuge. With tails erect, wings spread, and air sacs on their necks inflated, the slowly twisting and turning grouse beat a courtship rhythm on the cold bare hilltops like nothing else in nature. This phenomenon of nature is very unique to the grouse and can be observed easily on the dancing grounds.



These grounds, also known as "leks," are usually situated on grassy hilltops and are normally used year after year — possibly decades, unless they are excessively disturbed. Each spring the males return to traditional leks and start to dance. The main purpose of the lek is to provide an area for the males to display their dancing abilities to females. The "strongest" and "fittest" males dance near the center of the lek. Each male has

his own little territory on the lek and should invasions of territories occur, fights will often develop.

Shortly after the males start dancing, the females will appear and usually seem uninterested and bored with the routine. After several days or weeks of dancing and courtship, nesting will occur.

Biologists debate the reason for this display by the males. No one questions the fact that the activity is an advertisement to the opposite sex. No hen could remain unaware of this courtship act.

Other theories regard the display as a release of surplus energy, or that the males are trying to attract predators away from the females. The dancing male is usually quite vulnerable to predators and the remains of birds are occasionally found on the grounds.

Plains Indians called the grouse "sihska". They were so impressed by the antics of the grouse that they often imitated the dancing birds in their tribal ceremonies.

The grouse lek is one of the most important parts of sharp-tail life. Reduction of suitable lek locations has caused a decline of sharp-tailed grouse in some areas. Lek densities provide an index to populations of this remarkable bird, and indirectly reflect changes in habitat quality.



## VISITOR OPPORTUNITIES

- Visitors to Upper Souris Refuge have a unique chance to observe and photograph these birds by simply making reservations for one of the blinds that have been set up near the leks. Several guidelines should be observed when using the blinds.
- First of all, try to arrive as early as possible. Usually the birds are on the lek by dawn or early evening. Should the birds be there and flush when you arrive, enter the blind and wait. They have a very strong tie to the lek and will normally return in a short time.
- Secondly, be as quiet as possible. Even though the birds tend to lose some of their wild way, they are still aware of danger. Excessive noise in the blind may spook or move them away from the lek.
- Each blind will accommodate up to four people. However, if a lot of equipment for taking photos is to be used, there will be room for no more than two or three people.

Reservations can be made by calling refuge headquarters between 8:00 a.m. and 4:30 p.m. Monday through Friday at 701-468-5467. Reservation requests can also be made by emailing [uppersouris@fws.gov](mailto:uppersouris@fws.gov) or by writing to:

Upper Souris NWR  
17705 212<sup>th</sup> Ave NW  
Foxholm, ND 58718

Please include name, address, phone number, and blind number on email and written requests.

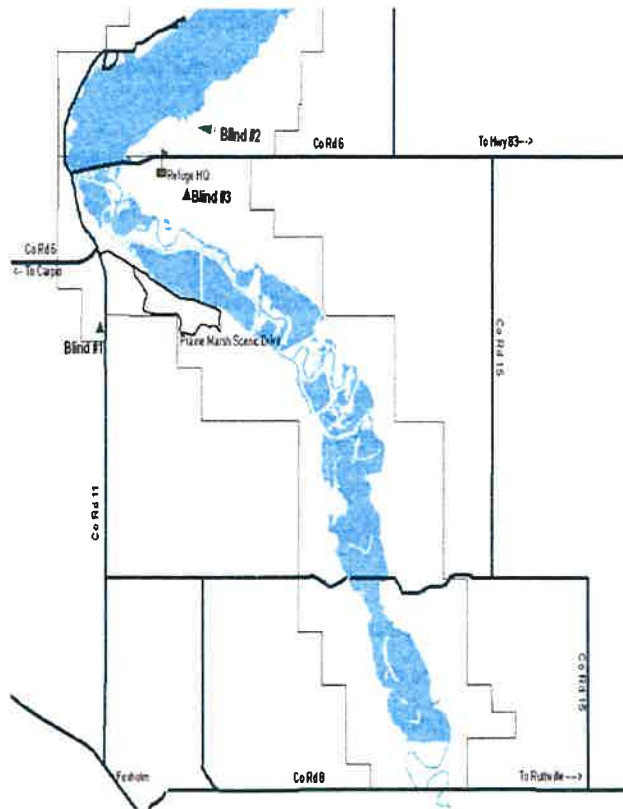
## GROUSE BLINDS

**Blind #1:** From Refuge Headquarters, go west on Co. Rd. 6, over the dam, follow road south. Continue onto Co. Rd. 11 a little over ½ mile. You will see blind from the road. Park on the shoulder of the road or in the ditch.

**Blind #2:** From Refuge Headquarters, go east on Hwy 6 for 1.1 miles. Park on north side of highway by gate. Walk north on service trail for .3 miles. Find sign on left side of trail that reads "Grouse Blind" with a left arrow. Turn left and walk NW across the prairie & follow a line of poles that have reflectors on them (using a compass the signs are at 320°). The distance from turning off the service road to the blind is .4 miles. Six white & red reflector poles are spaced 100-200 yards apart. You will need a flashlight to see pole-to-pole across the prairie in the dark morning to access the blind. The surrounding area is "rolling prairie". The blind is up on a higher patch of ground, getting near to the water of Lake Darling. Some of the surrounding area has standing water in the lower areas. The grouse blind has white and red reflectors on the outside. Total distance from parking area to the blind is .7 miles so plan 20-30 minutes in the dark to find it. GPS coordinates are:

N48degrees 28.105'      W10degrees 32.950'

**Blind #3:** From Refuge Headquarters, go east on Hwy 6 .3 miles. Park on south side of highway by gate. Walk ¼ mile south on mowed trail.



# Sharp-tailed Grouse on Upper Souris National Wildlife Refuge

